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Allen W. Dulles

How can a man with a stern Presbyterian upbringing and outlook operate in the amoral world of governmental intelligence services, where men's souls are bought and their minds burglarized? This seeming logical contradiction was a steady comfort to Allen W. Dulles's critics—picking up where they had left off with his older brother Foster, whose moralizing and ethicizing as Secretary of State were equaled only by the deviousness and cold-bloodedness of his power plays in various parts of the world.

Yet it was not so much an inconsistency as the CIA's many unfriendly observers liked to think. To some extent, a theological descendant of John Knox could always behold the devil, alive and up to his malign tricks, in nations infected with communism. Penetrating the Communist apparatuses, thwarting the Communist endeavors was manifestly a central theme of Allen Dulles's long and valuable CIA career.

If, on the death of the CIA's most celebrated director so far, analysis of his purposes thus tends to reach out for large and cloudy expressions and the balance of his success and failure is obscure, proportion can be restored by focusing instead on the full, and deservedly famous, family group of the Fosters, Dulleses and Lansings as described by Allen Dulles himself in autobiographical passages in his book, "The Craft of Intelligence." At work or at leisure, older generation and younger, they thought, talked and wrote about the world's public affairs. Amusing, now, to think of Allen W. Dulles as author of a Washington bestseller defending the Boers, when he was 8 years old; but also significant.

Allen Dulles's ultimate goal, in OSS and later in CIA, was simply the information, accurate and timely, that this nation needed for an understanding of what other nations were up to. To an extent that security classification will long make unmeasurable, he and his agents and analysts went out and got that information. "Intelligence operations," as he dryly put it, "can help mightily to protect the nation."